

100 Best Last Lines from Novels

1. ...you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. –Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (1953; trans. Samuel Beckett)

2. Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you? –Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

3. So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. –F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

4. ...I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. –James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)

5. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before. –Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

6. “Yes,” I said. “Isn't it pretty to think so?” –Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)

7. He loved Big Brother. –George Orwell, *1984* (1949)

8. ‘It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.’ –Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

9. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. –Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902)

10. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. –Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

11. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. –James Joyce, “The Dead” in *Dubliners* (1914)

12. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita. –Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

13. And you say, “Just a moment, I've almost finished *If on a winter's night a traveler* by Italo Calvino.” –Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979; trans. William Weaver)

14. Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! –Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853)

15. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. –Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967; trans. Gregory Rabassa)

16. Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining. –Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (1951, trans. Patrick Bowles)

17. So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars'll be out, and don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty. –Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957)

18. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!* –William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)

19. L--d! said my mother, what is all this story about?— —
A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick— —And one of the best of its kind I ever heard.
–Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767)

20. ‘I shall feel proud and satisfied to have been the first author to enjoy the full fruit of his writings, as I desired, because my only desire has been to make men hate those false, absurd histories in books of chivalry, which thanks to the exploits of my real Don Quixote are even now tottering, and without any doubt will soon tumble to the ground. Farewell.’ –Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615; trans. John Rutherford)

21. If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who. –Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (1963)

22. **YOU HAVE FALLEN INTO ART—RETURN TO LIFE** –William H. Gass, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968)

23. In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel. –Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)

24. *Go, my book, and help destroy the world as it is.* –Russell Banks, *Continental Drift* (1985)

25. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan. –Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

26. The knife came down, missing him by inches, and he took off. –Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (1961)

27. Is it possible for anyone in Germany, nowadays, to raise his right hand, for whatever the reason, and not be flooded by the memory of a dream to end all dreams? –Walter Abish, *How German Is It?* (1980)

28. Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. –Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)

29. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. –George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871–72)

30. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance. –Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

31. Now everybody — –Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)

32. But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. –Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816)

33. It was the nightmare of real things, the fallen wonder of the world. –Don DeLillo, *The Names* (1982)

34. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city. –Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947; trans. Stuart Gilbert)

35. This is not the scene I dreamed of. Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere. –J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980)

36. “Like a dog!” he said, it was as if the shame of it must outlive him. –Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925; trans. Willa and Edwin Muir)

37. P.S.
Sorry I forgot to give you the mayonnaise.
–Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America* (1967)

38. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate. –Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942; trans. Matthew Ward)

39. Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace. –Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981)

40. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49. –Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965)

41. I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth. –Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

42. A way a lone a last a loved a long the –James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (1939)

43. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America. –Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953)

44. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead. –Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

45. Are there any questions? –Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986)

46. It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow. –Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973)

47. And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One! –Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

48. “No glot...C’lom Fliday” –William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (1959)

49. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which. –George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (1945)

50. “Poor Grendel’s had an accident,” I whisper. “*So may you all.*” –John Gardner, *Grendel* (1971)

51. So I mean listen I got this neat idea hey, you listening? Hey? You listening...? –William Gaddis, *J R* (1975)

52. Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody. –J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

53. The aircraft rise from the runways of the airport, carrying the remnants of Vaughan’s semen to the instrument panels and radiator grilles of a thousand crashing cars, the stances of a million passengers. –J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (1973)

54. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past. –Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918)

55. We shall come back, no doubt, to walk down the Row and watch young people on the tennis courts by the clump of mimosas and walk down the beach by the bay, where the diving floats lift gently in the sun, and on out to the pine grove, where the needles thick on the ground will deaden the footfall so that we shall move among the trees as soundlessly as smoke. But that will be a long time from now, and soon now we shall go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time. –Robert Penn Warren, *All the King’s Men* (1946)

56. He knelt by the bed and bent over her, draining their last moment to its lees; and in the silence there passed between them the word which made all clear. –Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905)

57. “All that is very well,” answered Candide, “but let us cultivate our garden.” –Voltaire, *Candide* (1759; trans. Robert M. Adams)

58. He was the only person caught in the collapse, and afterward, most of his work was recovered too, and it is still spoken of, when it is noted, with high regard, though seldom played. –William H. Gaddis, *The Recognitions* (1955)

59. Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead. –James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)

60. One bird said to Billy Pilgrim, “*Poo-tee-weet?*” –Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)

61. For now she knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it. –Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)

62. I never saw any of them again—except the cops. No way has yet been invented to say goodbye to them. –Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (1953)

63. The key to the treasure is the treasure. –John Barth, “Dunyazadiad” from *Chimera* (1972)

64. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain. –Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)

65. This is the difference between this and that. –Gertrude Stein, *A Novel of Thank You* (1958)

66. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing. –A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928)

67. “Vaya con Dios, my darklin’, and remember: vote early and vote often, don’t take any wooden nickels, and” —by now I was rolling about helplessly on the spare-room floor, scrunched up around my throbbing pain and bawling like a baby— “always leave ’em laughin’ as you say good-bye!” –Robert Coover, *The Public Burning* (1977)

68. Then there are more and more endings: the sixth, the 53rd, the 131st, the 9,435th ending, endings going faster and faster, more and more endings, faster and faster until this book is having 186,000 endings per second. –Richard Brautigan, *A Confederate General from Big Sur* (1964)

69. She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn’t begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light. –Flannery O’Connor, *Wise Blood* (1952)

70. He heard the ring of steel against steel as a far door clanged shut. –Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)

71. So that, in the end, there was no end. –Patrick White, *The Tree of Man* (1955)

72. The old man was dreaming about the lions. –Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)

73. Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine. –Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (1947)

74. *Tell me how free I am.* –Richard Powers, *Prisoner’s Dilemma* (1988)

75. “We shall never be again as we were!” –Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902)

76. ‘I closed my eyes, head drooping, like a person drunk for so long she no longer knows she’s drunk, and then, drunk, awoke to the world which lay before me.’ –Kathy Acker, *Don Quixote* (1986)

77. “Tomorrow, I’ll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day.” –Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (1936)

78. He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die. –Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (1985)

79. “And then the storm of shit begins” –Roberto Bolaño, *By Night in Chile* (2000; trans. Chris Andrews)

80. Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry. –Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (1956)

81. It’s old light, and there’s not much of it. But it’s enough to see by. –Margaret Atwood, *Cat’s Eye* (1988)

82. Ah: runs. Runs. –John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (1960)

83. They were only a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; the memory of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years. –Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way* (1913; trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin)

84. But I knew that Catherine had kissed me because she trusted me, and that made me happy then but now I am sad because by the time my eyes close each night I suspect that as usual I have been fooling myself, that she, too, is in her grave. –William T. Vollmann, *You Bright and Risen Angels* (1987)

85. But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life. That might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended. –Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1866; trans. Constance Garnett)

86. He waited for someone to tell him who to be next. –Brian Evenson, *The Open Curtain* (2006)

87. That’s it. The sun in the evening. The moon at dawn. The still voice. –John Hawkes, *Second Skin* (1964)

88. “Meet Mrs Bundren,” he says. –William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930)

89. this way this way this way this way this way this way this
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–Ronald Sukenick, *Out* (1973)

90. ...and to all you other cats and chicks out there, sweet or otherwise, buried deep in wordy tombs, who never yet have walked from off the page, a shake and a hug and a kiss and a drink. Cheers! –Gilbert Sorrentino, *Mulligan Stew* (1979)

91. Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out. –William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847–48)

92. Maybe I will go to Paris. Who knows? But I’ll sure as hell never go back to Texas again. –James Crumley, *The Final Country* (2001)

93. “Terminal.” –John Barth, *The End of the Road* (1958)

94. From the sky a swift Angel descends, an Angel with a golden helmet and green spurs, a flaming sword in his hand, an Angel escaped from the Indo-Hispanic altars of opulent hunger, from need overcome by sleep, from the coupling of opposites: body and soul, wakefulness and death, living and sleeping, remembering and desiring, imagining: the happy boy who reaches the sad land carries all this on his lips, he bears the memory of death, white and extinguished, like the flame that went out in his mother’s belly: for a swift, marvelous instant, the boy being born knows that this light of memory, wisdom, and death was an Angel and that this other Angel who flies from the navel of heaven with the sword in his hand is the fraternal enemy of the first: he is the Baroque Angel, with a sword in his hand and quetzal wings, and a serpent doublet, and a golden helmet, the Angel strikes, strikes the lips of the boy being born on the beach: the burning and painful sword strikes his lips and the boy forgets, he forgets everything forgets everything, f
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–Carlos Fuentes, *Christopher Unborn* (1987; trans. Alfred MacAdam and Carlos Fuentes)

95. From here on in I rag nobody. –Mark Harris, *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956)

96. My love for my children makes me glad that I am what I am and keeps me from desiring to be otherwise; and yet, when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent, I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. –James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912)

97. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air. –Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899)

98. And he couldn’t do it. He could not fucking die. How could he leave? How could he go? Everything he hated was here. –Philip Roth, *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995)

99. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. –Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

100. “GOOD GRIEF—IT’S DADDY!” –Terry Southern and Mason Hoffenberg, *Candy* (1958)